

I will be hosting a White House Conference on Mental Health, an area that has been a special concern, as I'm sure many of you know, to Mrs. Gore for many years. One of our goals is to help more Americans understand that mental illness is not a character flaw. It is a disability.

That is why today I am using my executive authority as President to strip away outdated barriers that keep people with psychiatric disabilities from serving America in our Federal Government, directing all Federal agencies to provide applicants with mental illnesses the same opportunities as other applicants with disabilities to work for the United States of America.

As you know, and as we see here today, not only the Government, but individual citizens can take action and make an enormous difference. The three citizens we honor today are proof of the difference one person can make, and I am proud to present these awards to each of them.

First, to Joyce Bender. Fifteen years ago, as Joyce lay in a hospital trauma unit, recovering from a near-fatal cerebral hemorrhage, she made a vow to give something back to the patients who were not so lucky. Through Bender Consulting Services, she's used her own expertise as a professional headhunter to place people with disabilities in high-wage, high-tech jobs.

She knows the demand for high-skill workers will only continue to grow, and she is determined to make sure people with disabilities will be ready to meet it. She's founded a new program to train even more people with disabilities in the high-tech skills that are the ticket to the world of the 21st century.

It's an honor to present this award to Joyce Bender. Joyce.

*[The President presented the award and congratulated Ms. Bender.]*

**The President.** Next, to James Click, Jr. Over more than 30 years as a car dealer in California and Arizona, Jim Click has become an undisputed leader in his field. But he's also unrivaled in his commitment to extending opportunity to people with disabilities.

A few years ago, he discovered he could encourage more businesses to follow his lead

by making it easier for them to find workers with the right skills. So he founded LINKAGES, which brings Tucson businesses and rehabilitation programs together to match qualified workers with disabilities to jobs in the private sector.

In a little over a year, more than 170 people have found work through LINKAGES. It's an honor to present this award to Jim Click and hope others will follow his lead in every community in the country.

*[The President presented the award and congratulated Mr. Click.]*

**The President.** Finally, to Laura Hershey. Laura has said, and I quote, "Disability is not a tragedy. It is powerful."

By speaking her mind, and using her gifts as a writer to point out the shortcomings and the possibilities of our society, Laura has found the power to make the world a better place for people with disabilities. As head of a variety of disability organizations, and as a private citizen, she has fought to reform our Social Security, housing and transportation systems to better serve Americans living with disabilities.

Economic freedom and self-sufficiency for Americans with disabilities is her goal. I am confident she will not rest until she achieves it. And I am proud to present this third and final award to Laura Hershey.

*[The President presented the award and congratulated Ms. Hershey.]*

**The President.** So there you have them: a high-tech headhunter from Pittsburgh, a car dealer from Tucson, an activist from Denver. Now, if you didn't see them you might think, just by those descriptions, that these people have little in common. But they are bound together by their remarkable passion for empowering Americans with disabilities and helping all Americans to live closer to the ideal of equal opportunity for all. Each is, therefore, a true patriot.

President Truman once said, "We love our country because it offers us the chance to lead useful lives and to do what we can for those around us."

I thank each of you for reminding us that, really, those two things are two sides of the same coin. We cannot truly lead useful lives